

The Confessional

REV. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.





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The Confessional in the
English Church

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REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, M.A.

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The Confessional in the English Church

ITS AUTHORITY AND ITS INFLUENCE

BY THE

REV. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

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NOTE

THE following chapters deal only with certain aspects of the Confessional, and make no claim to completeness. The manuals and tracts placed in the hands of adults and young children have been, as far as possible, used to show the doctrine and practices recommended within the English Church.

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The Confessional in the English Church

CHAPTER I

THE POSITION TO-DAY

IN 1866 Mr. Joseph Masters, publisher, New Bond Street, produced a small paper-covered octavo volume of ninety pages, entitled "The Priest in Absolution: a Manual for such as are Called unto the Higher Ministries in the English Church" (Part I.). There were no indications as to authorship, nor as to the agency which procured the issue of the work. The book must, however, have found a welcome, for by the year 1869 it had appeared in a second edition. The volume put forth as Part I. was succeeded by another, distin-

guished as Part II., of the same general appearance, but containing 322 pages. This volume presented externally some curious changes. It had no author's name, no publisher's name, no printer's name. The cover announced it as "Privately printed for the use of the clergy," and the following note appeared below the "Advertisement to the Reader":—

"To prevent scandal arising from the curious or prurient misuse of a book which treats of spiritual diseases, it has been thought best that the sale should be confined to the clergy who desire to have at hand a sort of Vade Mecum for easy reference in the discharge of their duties as Confessors."

The apprehensions here expressed do not seem to have been felt at first, but it must be confessed that the contents of the two books amply justified the caution at last displayed. In Great Britain the work is, as the result of public indignation, placed beyond the reach of the prurient; but it is

said that in America a cheap edition has been published, doubtless to gratify the curiosity of persons lacking any sort of claim or desire to act as "Confessors."

It is no part of my present task to recall in detail the controversy which the publication of this book caused. It is an English version of a manual by the Abbé Gaume. Its author or adapter was the Rev. J. C. Chambers. He prepared the manual at the suggestion of the Society of the Holy Cross, to the members of which Part II. is dedicated. They may have anticipated its general use. For, whilst the manual was in undisturbed circulation, the Bishops were approached with a formal petition to appoint clergy as authorised "Confessors." "The Priest in Absolution" would doubtless have been suggested as their recognised handbook. The character of the work was hardly known to the general public until, on June 14, 1877, Lord Redesdale, a trusted High Churchman of the older school, brought the subject before the House of Lords. His exposure

moved the whole country. The Upper House of Canterbury Convocation condemned the book, and the Bishops had some dealings with the Society concerned in its publication. The Society itself was not at one as to its duty ; but the general result was to stop the circulation of the manual.

It is quite unnecessary to recall in quotations the particular passages in the book to which especial attention was drawn. Public comment seems to have been most affected by their brutal frankness. The offence, however—in a book not meant for general reading—did not lie in words, but in the system they implied. As a matter of fact, those passages merely reproduced, with some modifications and omissions, what may be called the common form of the Continental method at the Confessional. The matter, indeed, was old ; and the most repulsive parts of the originals had been omitted. But the English people did not then know much either of the Confessional or its literature. When they learned such

details as "The Priest in Absolution" chose to tell, they were amazed and alarmed. But the language of utter disgust and loathing used towards the book by Bishops, clergy, and laity alike only expressed the natural feeling of decent minds. Pusey, then the great central figure of extreme Churchmen, seems to have thought Mr. Chambers went a little too far; but his defence is, in effect, the worst condemnation of the book.

Pusey, as his "Life" (iv. 303) shows, was himself at work translating and editing Gaume when the Holy Cross Society forestalled him with the version they called "The Priest in Absolution." When his own book came out, it was found that Pusey had omitted Gaume's section (§ 178) dealing with the Seventh Commandment. Whether he would have done so but for the excitement caused by the disclosure of "The Priest in Absolution" is perhaps doubtful; but in any case the book he chose for the edification of English clergy

had to be more severely edited by him than by Mr. Chambers before it could be put into open circulation in England. Pusey was more cautious than the author of "The Priest in Absolution"; but that he could not disguise the true character of the work, and of the institution of which it treats, any reader of Pusey's Gaume can see for himself.

Pusey's own method of defending "The Priest in Absolution" is not that the worst section was unnecessary, but that it was unnecessary in certain cases. He has some oratorical references (Preface to Gaume, pp. xvi, xviii) to the "wickedness of the adversary" in insinuating "that questions of this sort" (that of the kind most objected to in "The Priest in Absolution") "would be asked of the modest wives and daughters of our English homes." The questions, he contends, "directed to be made of the *ill*-instructed do not justify any alarm as to the *well*-instructed." I do not think the average English mind

will regard this as an adequate defence. Apparently questions may be put to the maid-servant which should not in general be asked of the mistress; and the wife of the labourer may be cross-examined about what should not be suggested to the wife of the peer. And what of children and young people? Are they "*well-instructed*" or "*ill-instructed*"? The distinction is interesting; but, as a matter of fact, it is unreal. The Confessor is rightly urged to be careful how he suggests thoughts of impurity that may not be in the penitent's mind—a caution the authors of some manuals have ignored—but at the least hint or suggestion of sin he must use the probe. For if there has been sin it is his business to find it out. He must know "*Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando*" (Pusey, p. 152).

Looking back at the controversy, it is a little astonishing to compare the intense excitement of the seventies with the very modified resentment of the present time.

But there are facts which may account for the change. The almost universal condemnation of "The Priest in Absolution," and its withdrawal from public circulation, led careless observers to suppose that the evil had been arrested; that the practice had been stopped as well as the sale of the book, or at least gravely modified. Moreover, the indignation of the seventies was succeeded by the comparative indulgence of the eighties. To a time of resentment and active hostility there succeeded in many quarters a period of toleration. Men, anxious as far as possible to avoid controversy, waited to see whether the relapse into pre-Reformation practices would lose its strength if left without the incentive of studied hostility.

That policy, as many of those who thought it should be tried now sadly confess, was an utter failure. But in the period of toleration the party who agreed with the principles and methods of "The Priest in Absolution" were not idle. The

book which had outraged the public sense of decency was kept out of sight; its teaching went on. There is no evidence to show that members of the Holy Cross Society or other extreme Churchmen modified their action in the smallest degree as the result of that agitation. There is, however, abundant evidence to prove that the principles of the book are carefully followed to-day. The late Mr. Mackonochie, in his published correspondence with "A London Priest," admitted that the "principles" of "The Priest in Absolution" "are those which govern, I believe, all Confessors amongst ourselves." That statement seems still to be true.

It is significant of the present condition of affairs that the long and exciting controversy which raged over "The Priest in Absolution" is (doubtless as implying shame to the Church) ignored in popular (and even some more ambitious) Church histories, and is as hastily as possible dismissed even in the encyclopædic "Life of Pusey."

Is our position, therefore, satisfactory? Assuredly not; for *whatever customs and whatever scandals were implied by the use of "The Priest in Absolution" still exist, and that more widely than in the seventies.*

In particular there seems evidence that the minute inquiries into sins of impurity made of adults and children in the Confessional flourish more than ever.

As to the extent to which the Roman doctrine of the Sacrament of Penance is taught I have no statistics. But all the evidence goes to show that the doctrine and the accompanying resort to the Confessional have a firm hold on many parishes. Confessors' notices appear in church porches. Parish magazines announce the hours at which clergy attend to hear confessions. Neo-Anglican literature commands or suggests resort to the Confessional. In one parish, that of St. Peter's, London Docks, the approximate number of confessions heard in 1899 was given in the Annual Report as 3100 (*Record*, July 6, 1900).

There seem also to be vagrant confessors, mysteriously announcing by advertisement their presence at various churches.¹

The position secured amongst us by the Confessional may, however, be shown from evidence of another kind.

First let it be remembered that although "The Priest in Absolution" is not openly on sale in England, Pusey's own manual, "Advice for Those who Exercise the Ministry of Reconciliation through Confession and Absolution," is, as I have said, only an expurgated version of the same manual by the Abbé Gaume, which Mr. Chambers treated with less reserve. He had much of the volume in print, when Mr. Chambers forestalled him ("Life of Pusey," iv. 303). The last edition of Pusey's version is dated 1893; the book must therefore be in some

¹ The following is taken from the *Church Times* of June 8, 1900:—

B.—ST. SAVIOUR'S, St. George's-square,
S.W., JUNE 9th and 16th, 3.30 p.m. to 5.

As to the meaning of such announcements, see the *Record*, October 6, 1899.

demand. The extreme minuteness of the directions there conveyed to Confessors (though Pusey deemed it wise to leave some of the Abbé's material unexposed to the English gaze) is matched by the minuteness of inquiry suggested to "penitents."

The public mind resented most of all in the version of Mr. Chambers two or three passages of especial indecency. But the particular direction is of little importance if the principle be left behind. Pusey, though more guarded than Chambers, reveals the essential corruption of the Confessional. Take, for example, this direction from the chapter on "The Necessity of Questioning":—

"If necessary, the Confessor will teach the penitent how to examine his conscience, so as to recall all his sins and their circumstances, going through his whole life, first dividing it by age, childhood, youth, &c., then by his various conditions, before and since marriage, &c." (Pusey, p. 150).

Or witness this as to dealing with a person possibly guilty of sacrilegious confessions :—

“Ask if in past time he has concealed any sin out of shame? This question is specially necessary with ignorant people and women who make but rare confessions” (Pusey, p. 127).

And again of the same class :—

“As to scandal, ask if he has tried to make others sin, and whether he has forwarded the sins of others?” (*Ibid.* p. 128).

It would be easy to multiply details of this kind; but the case against the clergy does not rest on the Gaume book. It is out of the question that there should be a small library of manuals about Confession if the clergy did not teach its need. And these manuals, though compiled with more care and reserve than Mr. Chambers thought needful for the reading of the clergy, still indicate the existence of, and prepare the penitent for answering, those particular inquiries as to the temptations

and sins of the flesh the making of which the Gaume books discuss.

A few examples of the contents of such manuals may be pardoned. For the guidance of adults here is a neatly got up little volume entitled "Catholic Prayers for Church of England People" (W. Knott). The preface is signed "A. H. S.," and the fourth edition is dated 1897. The section entitled "The Sacrament of Penance" contains a "Preparation for Confession," and "Another Form of Self-examination." In the section "Sins against Myself," "Sins against Self and Fellow-men," "Sins of Married People," "Sins of Young Women," we have the preparation to answer the very kind of questions which the public mind in 1877 deemed revolting. One paragraph on inquiry into "Sins Against Self and Fellow-men" will suffice :—

"*Lust*—Impure thoughts or desires—in-decent curiosity—delight in reading or writing of unclean things—improper conversation, jokes, songs, pictures, danger-

ous dances—improper liberties—immodest touch of yourself or another” (p. 33).

“Absolution and How to Obtain It” (W. Knott) deals fully with the Seventh Commandment, thus:—

“Committed adultery; fornication; indecent acts with others, or alone; done things I should be ashamed for others to know of. Read, written, or said indecent things; encouraged indecent thoughts. Been too free with others; allowed any one to be too free with me. Got drunk; taken more drink than was good for me; made fun of drunkenness. Led others into sin of any kind; gone with bad companions, or to bad places. Laughed at others for doing right. Been over-fond of dress; been greedy, or dainty. Been slothful, or lazy” (p. 8).

This manual adds, “The Priest will ask you questions if he thinks it necessary” (p. 13).

“Pardon for the Penitent” (W. Knott) may also serve as an example of the

manual designed for simpler people. Its questions, particularly on pp. 14 and 15, again recall the worst features of "The Priest in Absolution." Here also one paragraph will be quite enough:—

"Have I ever been guilty of the following sins: Adultery, fornication, indecent acts with others, indecent acts alone, listening to or joining in indecent conversation, giving way to indecent thoughts, reading, looking at, or writing what is indecent, immodesty in manner, trying to attract notice from others of the opposite sex, putting myself in the way of temptation by keeping out late at night, going with bad companions or to bad places, vanity, being too fond of dress, greediness, drunkenness, daintiness, sloth, lying in bed, neglect of cleanliness?"

"The First Communion" (W. Knott) is a specimen of the Confessional manuals put into the hands of children. It will suffice to note the passage on p. 13:—

"If there is something that you ought

to confess, but you don't know how to say it, stop when you come to that part of your confession, and say : ' Father, there is something that I don't know how to confess.' Then the priest will give you the help you need."

Such are the preparations which the penitent is asked to make that he or she may be ready first to speak voluntarily and then to answer the questions of the priest.

In the face of this evidence it seems difficult to avoid the conviction that whatever offence was implied in the accused parts of "The Priest in Absolution" exists now, and assuredly over a very much wider area than in 1877. The book is named still with every sign of loathing ; the thing to which it witnessed flourishes unchecked. Now and then the public hear indignant denials that the Confessional produces any such questions as Pusey yesterday and the manuals for penitents to-day so frankly suggest. Why the clergy manual should deal with them, why it should go at such

length into the practical casuistry associated with such subjects if the questions are not asked, we do not know. But the passages already quoted seem to refute the plea. Perhaps an equally plain answer will be found in Pusey's introductory matter. He is there at some pains to defend the use of Confession in regard to sins against the Seventh Commandment, especially amongst boys.

Whatever indignation existed when "The Priest in Absolution" was first exposed to the public gaze is, then, even more justified now. The real feeling of the English people is, in all probability, as hostile as ever to the Confessional. But the general public have now been familiarised with its existence and, though uneasily and resentfully, are learning to tolerate it. The attitude of the Bishops as a body is in striking contrast to their conduct in the seventies. Amongst the clergy who do not practise as Confessors there is a manifest disposition to accept the revival of the Confessional as

merely a detail in the Neo-Anglican campaign. Unless the principles and methods of the Abbé Gaume, as expounded by Mr. Chambers and Dr. Pusey, are to be finally rooted amongst us, it is time that the stage of development already reached should be understood.

CHAPTER II

THE AUTHORITY FOR THE CONFESSIONAL : NOT HOLY SCRIPTURE

ROME and the advanced Anglican clergy, having exalted Penance to a place amongst the Sacraments, and declared this Sacrament to be the appointed way by which sin after Baptism is forgiven, we are entitled to demand the authority in Holy Scripture for the doctrine thus assumed.

It is at once plain that the voice of Holy Scripture is not that upon which the supporters of the Confessional are accustomed most to rely. The popular literature of the subject, the manuals so extensively circulated amongst the children and adults of parishes where the Neo-Anglican clergy are in power, occasionally refrain from any endeavour to support by reference to, or

quotation from, Holy Scripture the doctrine they state. "Absolution, and How to Obtain It" (fifth edition; Griffith, Farran, and Co.), takes this simple course. It offers a budget of sweeping assertions as to the purpose of God, without any supporting reference to Biblical or other authority. This, for example, is the bold way in which doctrine is defined:—"When we know our sins, and have true sorrow for them, we of course wish to have them forgiven; and God has mercifully sent his priests to give us absolution. Before, however, we can get this, we must show that our sorrow is true by telling God, before His priest, all the sins we can remember" (p. 3).

Occasionally the statement of the tract or manual is more explicit, but deals with the Bible in the Roman manner by general reference rather than by giving chapter and verse. Thus in "A Book for the Children of God" (W. Knott) we have (pp. 106, 107) the following statement:—

“If we are sorry for our sins; if we confess them truly; if we really intend to do better; then no matter how bad they are, nor how many they are, the priest in Christ’s Name can forgive them.

“IV. Jesus gave this power to the priesthood when He breathed on His Apostles, and said, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ To ‘remit’ means to ‘forgive’: to ‘retain’ means to ‘bind.’

“If, when we have made our confession, the priest sees that we are really sorry, and that we want to do better, then he says, ‘I absolve thee,’ and when those words are said the Precious Blood of Jesus touches our souls, and we really are forgiven.”

In “The Catholic Religion” (“The Sacraments,” IV. Penance) Mr. Vernon Staley seems content to rely solely upon his interpretation of St. John xx. 19–24, which, he holds, gives an account of our Lord’s

institution of "the Sacrament of Absolution."

A more elaborate statement, amounting to a definite and detailed appeal to Holy Scripture, is, however, found in pp. 6, 7, 8, of "Pardon for the Penitent" (W. Knott). I give it in full:—

"Confession to God before a priest was taught to the Jews by God in the law of Moses. It was taught by St. John the Baptist, and much practised by the people who came to him. It is recommended to Christians by St. James, chapter v. 16. And we find that Christians at Ephesus, who, having fallen away from God, were again converted by St. Paul, used it: 'They came and confessed, and showed their deeds' (Acts xix. 18).

"Above all, our Lord showed His approval of Confession by giving His Church power to *remit or retain* sins, St. John xx. 21-23. This is a twofold gift to be used for the good of souls; and the priests can only know in which way to exercise

the power by first hearing the person's confession.

"Absolution is a special gift which Christ brought us. The Jewish sacrifices were only types of the great deliverance which Christ would win for us on the Cross, and make over to us through the Sacraments of the Church.

"Absolution or the power to forgive sins was given to our Lord as Son of Man, as we read in St. Matthew ix. 6. It was always His as Son of God, but He had the power given to Him as Son of Man. Our Lord gave this power to His Church to use for Him : 'As the Father hath sent Me, so send I you, . . . receive the Holy Ghost ; whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain they are retained' (St. John xx. 21-23).

"God has chosen to use men as instruments by which to give us His spiritual gifts. He gave us the Bible through the men He inspired to write it. He makes

us Christians in Holy Baptism, and feeds us with His Body and Blood in Holy Communion, through the ministry of His clergy. We receive the Holy Ghost in Confirmation through the ministry of the Bishop. It is quite natural that God should also give us the forgiveness of sins after Baptism by the ministry of His priests."

The St. Bartholomew's (Brighton) tract, "Do You Hold with Confession?" (Taylor, Warwick-lane, E.C.) also discusses the appeal to Holy Scripture, with a certain degree of ingenious, not to say audacious application of familiar passages. Thus, "Lo, I am with you alway . . ." "meant that He would be with their [the Apostles'] successors in the ministry as long as the world lasts, and would give force to all the acts which He had bidden them do in His Name, including the forgiving of sins" (p. 3). Simon Magus does not receive absolution because he was unrepentant; "but if Simon had been really sorry and

had owned his sin, don't you think that St. Peter would have exercised on him the power of absolution which all the Apostles received from the Lord on Easter Day?" (p. 4). On other like reasoning in this tract more will be found below.

The appeal to Holy Scripture is almost exclusively confined to the interpretation of St. John xx. 22, 23, as ordaining the Sacrament of Absolution, and then to forcing from a few passages in the Epistles some support to the plea. Of attempt to prove from the New Testament the actual practice of the Confessional as we know it—as, for example, a preliminary to the reception of the Holy Communion, or as a recognised, habitual means of grace—there are few traces. The author of the St. Bartholomew's tract attempts to account for the gap by alleging that there are "very few references in the Acts to any Sacramental ordinances at all." There, of course, are sufficient and very detailed references in Acts to the only Sacraments recognised by

the English Church as ordained by Christ; whilst in the Epistles—surely a better guide as to the pastoral life of the Apostolic Church—such references are still more adequate. Yet even the most tortuous exegesis fails to supply warrant for the regular resort to the Confessional commanded by Rome and the Neo-Anglican clergy.

It is necessary, however, to look in some detail at such passages as, by one manual or another, are pressed into service of the cause.

There are the familiar words of our Lord in St. Matt. xviii. 18:—"Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." But the misapplication of this passage is obvious. It is not persons but *things* (ὅσα ἐὰν δήσητε . . . ὅσα ἐὰν λύσητε) which are "bound" and "loosed." As the Bishop (J. Wordsworth) of Salisbury reminded his clergy (*Letter to the Clergy of the Diocese of Salisbury*, p. 49), the power indicated is

a power over things and not persons, a power to prohibit or admit, a power to make rules and not to grant absolutions; so that "on this text we may rest the validity of the canonical rules of the Church, but not the ministry of penitence to persons."

There are, again, the less used but occasionally quoted words of our Lord in St. Matt. viii. 4, "Go thy way, show thyself unto the priest," upon which some Anglicans as well as some Romans have stoutly relied. But the passage is absolutely fatal to those who use it; for our Lord did not utter the words "show thyself to the priest" until *after* the man had been cleansed of his leprosy.

Sometimes reference is confidently made to the case of the Ephesian converts (Acts xix. 18), who "came, and confessed, and showed their deeds" (ἐξομολογούμενοι, καὶ ἀναγγέλλοντες τὰς πράξεις αὐτῶν). The word (ἐξομολογούμενοι) is the same as that employed in Matt. iii. 6, and Mark i. 5 of the

confession of sins by those whom John baptized in Jordan. It is the same also as that used by St. James (v. 16, *ἐξομολογείσθε οὖν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἁμαρτίας*). In the case of St. John's converts, as in that of the Ephesians, the obvious interpretation is that of a public admission of past wrong—a confession as unlike the whispered conferences of the Confessional as anything can well be. In the precept of St. James the “confess your faults one to another” absolutely discountenances the assumption of any special duty of confessing to a priest. On the Neo-Anglican theory the Apostles and their successors were already in full possession of their powers of absolution. St. James has just spoken of recourse to “the presbyters,” and yet when it comes to the confession of sins it is “to one another” that the Confession is directed. Some even of the Roman authorities admit the impossibility of building on this text. Indeed in all these cases there seems a reasonable ground for publicity. Others

had, no doubt, known of the sins—or some of them. As the offences were public, so also was the confession. This is the interpretation offered to us by our own Church in Homily xxxii., Part 2 :—

“The true meaning of it is, that the faithful ought to acknowledge their offences, whereby some hatred, rancour, grudge, or malice, have risen or grown among them one to another, that a brotherly reconciliation may be had, without the which nothing that we do can be acceptable unto God, as our Saviour Jesus Christ doth witness Himself, saying, *When thou offerest thine offering at the altar, if thou rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thine offering, and go and be reconciled; and when thou art reconciled come and offer thine offering* (Matt. v. 23, 24). It may also be thus taken, that we ought to confess our weakness and infirmities one to another, to the end that, knowing each other's frailness, we may the more earnestly pray together unto Al-

mighty God, our heavenly Father, that He will vouchsafe to pardon us our infirmities, for His Son Jesus Christ's sake, and not to impute them unto us, when He shall render to every man according to his works."

Nor are they more happy in the argument drawn from the case of the incestuous offender in the Corinthian Church. The St. Bartholomew's tract "Do You Hold with Confession?" appears to regard the details of this case (1 Cor. v.; 2 Cor. ii.) as furnishing an example of priestly "binding" and "loosing," with, I suppose, confession as a precedent to absolution, which will furnish an exact precedent for the modern doctrine and practice as to the Confessional. But (1) there could have been no confession to St. Paul, for he issued his directions from a distance on information supplied to him by others. (2) The work is to be done by the Church in conjunction with the Apostle, and not by St. Paul alone; all that is effective being, in con-

formity with the Apostle's wish, wrought by the common action of the community (verses 11, 13). This joint exercise of ecclesiastical discipline is illustrated by the restoration of the offender (2 Cor. ii.). The punishment (or censure) "inflicted of many" had been efficacious. St. Paul, therefore, pleads for the offender's pardon and restoration to his place in the community: "Ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him" (verse 7); and promises to agree with their decision (verse 10). If, therefore, this is a case of absolution, it is given by the whole community, and agreed to by the Apostle. There is indeed "binding and loosing," inflicting and remitting an earthly penalty, but it is no example of the merely priestly use of such power.

It is scarcely perhaps credible that the Apostle's words, "for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person [margin: 'in the sight'] of Christ" (2 Cor. ii. 10), should be mistaken by any person who can read

Greek. But I cull the following interpretation from "Do You Hold with Confession?" (p. 4): "And in 2 Cor. 10, St. Paul forgives 'in the Person of Christ' this same man, after he had repented. To forgive 'in the Person of Christ' can mean nothing less than that the Apostle's forgiveness was identical with Christ's." To forgive *ἐν προσώπῳ Χριστοῦ* is, of course, to forgive "before the face of Christ," in the presence of his Master, though Paul could not be in the presence of the Corinthians to whom he was writing. The whole case is one of personal discipline being used towards an offender at the instigation of the Apostle, and being later on remitted at the plea of the same Apostle. There can be no possible question of the offender confessing to the Apostle and receiving absolution from him.

We come, therefore, to St. John xx. 22-23, upon which the Council of Trent bases the theory. Before that period many illustrious canonists had declined to found

the doctrine on the words of our Lord, whilst others, claiming this authority, yet disagreed as to their argument from it.

It may not immediately be clear to some minds why the words of St. John xx. 22, 23 ("And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained,") should imply the need of habitual confession to a priest. The reasoning is, however, as follows:—Christ, so it is argued, has made all priests His judges upon earth; no man can, speaking generally, obtain absolution and remission of sins committed after Baptism save through them; but they cannot absolve without full knowledge of the facts and motives, thoughts, words, and deeds of the penitent; therefore the penitent must tell all this in confession to the priest.

Will St. John xx. 22, 23 bear the strain thus put upon it?

A fatal difficulty is found in the fact that the words "He breathed on them, and saith unto them" are not necessarily limited to the ten Apostles. From St. Luke xxiv. 33 we learn that the eleven were not alone at this time. The words, "whose soever sins ye remit," cannot therefore apply only to the Apostles or any presumed successors; "the commission," says Bishop Westcott (on St. John, in the "Speaker's Commentary," p. 295), "must be regarded properly as the commission of the Christian society, and not as that of the Christian ministry." The whole passage is strikingly illustrated by the case of the incestuous person at Corinth, where an ecclesiastical and social penalty is first imposed by St. Paul and the community and the offender is afterwards forgiven in the same way. The "binding" is only to an earthly penalty, from which the "loosing" follows.

It would appear, then, that the attempt to found the Confessional on the witness of

the New Testament must fail. If it were otherwise; if the New Testament really does teach the doctrine of priestly Absolution and the necessity of Sacramental Confession; if the passages quoted really do indicate their existence in the Church of the New Testament, then surely we must find evidence of the facts in the other documents of the primitive Church. There is absolutely no such evidence—not a jot, not a tittle. Neither the Apostolic Fathers nor the *Didache* will supply the smallest countenance to either theory. Their silence is natural; they could not speak of what did not exist.

We may safely, therefore, reject the claim for Scriptural authority, and re-echo the words of our Church expressed in the Homily on Repentance:—

“It is most evident and plain that this auricular confession hath not His warrant of God’s Word. I do not say but that if any do find themselves troubled in conscience they may repair to their learned

Curate or Pastor and show the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hands the comfortable salve of God's Word; but it is against the true Christian liberty that any man should be bound to the numbering of his sins, as it hath been used heretofore in the time of blindness and ignorance."

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHORITY FOR THE CONFESSIONAL : NOT ENGLISH BUT ROMAN

I HAVE endeavoured to show that there is no warrant in Holy Scripture for the Confessional as ordered by the Romans and by some Anglicans.

It remains to ask whether such authority can be found in the Formularies of the English Church.

But, before entering upon this inquiry, it may be as well to see how the Roman Church arrived at the position in regard to the Confessional which it occupies to-day. The story describes a process of development the direction of which is steadily away from the pattern of primitive and Apostolic faith and practice.

We start in the Apostolic Church with

Confession one to another, often, it would seem, made in public. Then came the advice to penitents to seek out a spiritual director, who should tell them how far their most secret offences ought to be confessed in public. The office of a public penitentiary in the Greek Church began about the year 360. In the Latin Church public Confession to the whole congregation went on till about 450, when Pope Leo the Great decided that private Confession was enough of itself to clear the conscience of the offenders. With private Confession grew up the custom of private absolution. The doctrine was firmly established by the year 1215, when the Lateran Council laid it down that every one should confess yearly to the minister of the parish. The next step was to elevate penitence to the position of an article of the faith. This is definitely reached in the proceedings of the Council of Trent in its fourteenth Session in 1551. The statement of the Council of Trent, in English, is as follows :—

“Can. 1. If any one shall say, that penance in the Catholick Church is not truly and properly a sacrament, instituted by Christ our Lord, for reconciling the faithful to God, as often as they fall into sin after baptism : let him be accursed.

“Can. 4. If any one shall deny, that for the entire and perfect remission of sins there are required three acts in the penitent, being, as it were, the matter of the sacrament of penance, namely, Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction, which are called the three parts of penance : . . . let him be accursed.

“Can. 6. If any one shall deny, that sacramental confession was either instituted, or is necessary to salvation, by the divine law ; or shall say, that the method, which the Catholick Church from the beginning has always observed, and does observe, of secretly confessing to the priest alone, is foreign from the institution and command of Christ, and is a human invention : let him be accursed.

“Can. 7. If any one shall say, that in the sacrament of penance it is not by the divine law necessary for the remission of sins, to confess all and singular mortal sins, the memory of which may be had on due and diligent premeditation, even secret ones, and those which are against the two last commandments of the decalogue, and the circumstances which change the appearance of the sin; but that such confession is only useful for instructing and consoling the penitent, and was formerly observed only for imposing canonical satisfaction; or shall say that they who study to confess all their sins, are willing to leave nothing to be pardoned by the divine mercy; or, finally, that it is not lawful to confess venial sins: let him be accursed.

“Can. 8. If any one shall say, that Confession of all sins, such as the Church preserves, is impossible, and a human tradition, to be abolished by the pious; or that all and singular the faithful of Christ of each sex are not bound to observe it, according

to the constitution of the great council of Lateran, once a year; and therefore that the faithful of Christ are not to be persuaded to confess in the time of Lent: let him be accursed." (The Roman doctrine on this and other points on which she is at variance with the Church of England may be found conveniently set out in Bishop Mant: "Churches of Rome and England Compared." S.P.C.K.)

The date of the Tridentine statement, 1551, must be carefully observed. It has been the custom of some Neo-Anglican controversialists to assume that the English Church in drawing up its Prayer-book and Formularies did not mean definitely to dissent from and protest against certain articles of faith and certain practices of the Church of Rome. But the Council of Trent lasted from 1545 to 1563. Now the Book of Common Prayer, as we have it, was finally revised in 1661; and we are therefore entitled to consider the Prayer-book as framed in full view of the Tridentine proceedings.

The Thirty-nine Articles finally reached their present form in the year 1571, and their testimony must be viewed in the same light. The Second Book of the Homilies, containing the sermon which deals with the argument for the Confessional, was published in 1563.

We have, in fact, this position: Before the Reformation the custom of the English Church is that of the rest of the world in communion with Rome. After the Reformation that custom is decisively changed and the former habits expressly discountenanced in the official documents of the Church. If so distinct a subversion of the old order means nothing, it can only be that acts and words have no meaning.

Let us now mark the process of return to primitive doctrine as shown in the English Prayer-books. In the First Prayer-book of Edward VI., 1549, we have the following passage in the Exhortation in the Communion Office:—

“And yf there bee any of you, whose

conscience is troubled and greued in any thing, lackyng comferte or counsaill, let him come to me, or to some other dyscrete and learned priest, taught in the law of God, and confesse and open his synne and grieve secretly, that he may receiue suche ghostly counsaill, aduyse, and comfort, that his conscience maye be releued, and that of us (as of the ministers of GOD and of the church) he may receiue comfort and absolucion, to the satisfaccion of his mynde, and auoyding of all scruple and doubtfulness: requiryng suche as shalbe satisfied with a generall confession, not to be offended with them that doe use, to their further satisfyng, the auriculer and secret confession to the Priest: nor those also whiche thinke nedefull or conuenient, for the quietnes of their awne consciences, particularly to open their sinnes to the Priest: to bee offended with them that are satisfied, with their humble confession to GOD, and the generall confession to the church. But in all thinges to folowe and kepe the rule

of charitie, and euery man to be satisfied with his owne conscience, not iudgyng other mennes myndes or consciences ; where as he hath no warrant of Goddes word to the same."

In the Visitation of the Sick there are the following rubric and form of Absolution :—

"¶ Here shall the sicke person make a speciall confession, yf he fele his conscience troubled with any weightie matter. After which confession, the priest shall absolue hym after this forme : and the same forme of absolucion shalbe used in all pryuate confessions.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath lefte power to his Church to absolue all sinners, which truely repent and beleue in hym : of his great mercy forgeue thee thyne offences : and by his autoritie committed to me, I absolue thee frō all thy synnes, in the name of the father, and of the sonne, and of the holy gost. Amen."

The corresponding passages in the Second Prayer-book of Edward VI., 1552, are as follows :—

“ And because it is requisite that no man shoulde come to the holy Communion but with a full truste in God’s mercy, and with a quiet conscience: therefore if there be any of you which by the meanes afore said cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel; then let him come to me, or some other discreet and learned minister of god’s word, and open his grieve, that he may receiue such gostlye counsail, aduise, and coumfort, as his conscience maye be relieued; and that by the ministry of god’s word he may receiue coumfort and the benefite of absolucion, to the quieting of his conscience, and auoiding of al Scruple and doubt-fulnes.

“¶ *Here shal the sicke person make a special confession, yf he feeles his conscience troubled wyth any weyghtie matter. After which confession the Priest shal absolue hym after thys sorte.*

“ Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolue al sinners, whiche truely repent and beleue in him,

of his great mercy forgeue thee thine offences : and by his auctoritie committed to me, I absolue thee from all thy synnes, in the name of the father, and of the sonne, and of the holy gost. Amen."

These forms are continued in Elizabeth's Prayer-book, 1559, which came after the reformed services had been disused under Mary.¹ With these we can now compare the language of our present Prayer-book:—

"And because it is requisite, that no man should come to the holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God's holy word he may receive the benefit of

¹ The Prayer-books may be conveniently compared in the cheap series, "The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature." (Griffith, Farran & Co.)

absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.

“Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

We start, then, with admission of “auricular and secret confession to the Priest,” and when the Book of Common Prayer now in use is reached we have dropped the words “auricular and secret confession” as well as the word “Priest.” At the same time, in-

stead of a "Form of Absolution," we have only absolution "after this sort."

Together with this development let it be noted the First Prayer-book of Edward VI., which countenanced secret Confession, lacked the General Confession and Absolution at Morning and Evening Prayer. When the General Confession comes into the daily service, the duty of Confession directed to God and in the face of the congregation received the primitive emphasis. At the same time the countenance to secret Confession is withdrawn.

But now to deal specifically with our Prayer-book as it stands. Five kinds of Confession are noted in it:—

(1) Open and common Confession to God, made by clergy and people together in the General Confession at Morning and Evening Prayer, the Confession in the Communion Service, and the Confession in the Communion Service.

(2) Confession one to another:—"If ye shall perceive your offences to be such as are

not only against God, but also against your neighbours, then ye shall reconcile yourselves unto them, being ready to make restitution and satisfaction according to the uttermost of your powers for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any other.”—

Notice of Holy Communion.

(3) Open Confession for the satisfaction of the “congregation” :—“If any be an open and notorious evil liver or have done any wrong to his neighbours by word or deed so that the congregation be thereby offended the Curate shall call him and advertise him that in anywise he presume not to come to the Lord’s Table until he have openly declared himself to have truly repented and amended his former naughty life, that the congregation may be thereby satisfied which before were offended.”—

Rubric, Communion Service.

(4) Private Confession, in the case of one who requireth “further comfort or counsel” before Holy Communion :—

“And because it is requisite that no man

should come to the holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience ; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's word, and open his grief ; that by the ministry of God's holy word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."—*Notice of Holy Communion.*

(5) Private Confession of the Sick :—

"Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His

great mercy forgive thee thine offences :
And by His authority committed to me, I
absolve thee from all thy sins. In the
Name of the Father, and of the Son, and
of the holy Ghost. Amen.”—*Visitation of
the Sick.*

Only two of these kinds of Confession
call for any discussion.

The first is the passage in the Warning
or Notice of Holy Communion. It is this
that is most relied upon by extreme clergy
for a proof that our Church requires or
countenances habitual and secret Confes-
sion to the priest as a part of a Sacrament
of Penance. A little consideration will
show that the inferences drawn from it are
quite unwarrantable.

For :—1. Care has been taken to avoid
these very inferences. Confession to the
priest and absolution by the priest had
been the law for *all*. *All* are no longer
contemplated as needing this ministry, but
only some—“if there be any . . .” To
convert “if there be any” into “all of

you without exception" is a feat of some daring. The majority are to be content with the Confession to God suggested earlier in the "warning":—

"First, to examine your lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments; and whereinsoever ye shall perceive yourselves to have offended, either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to *confess yourselves to Almighty God*, with full purpose of amendment of life."

2. The changes made in the successive Prayer-books prove that this private Confession was to be not the rule but the exception. The words "confess," "secretly," "auricular and secret Confession to the Priest," are removed after the First Prayer-book. There is no talk of "Confession," but to "open his grief." There is no "Priest," though endeavours were made to retain the word here; a Deacon may give this "comfort or counsel." There is no "secretly"—a man may go with his friends,

or the sick man may talk in the presence of his family. There is no form of absolution, but “the benefit of absolution” is to come from “the ministry of God’s Holy Word”—the application to the sinner’s need of the passages of Holy Scripture which meet his condition. With this interpretation agrees the familiar passage in the Homily of Repentance, Part II. :—

“Being therefore not led with the conscience thereof, let us with fear and trembling, and with a true contrite heart, use that kind of confession that God doth command in His word; and then doubtless, as *He is faithful and righteous, He will forgive us our sins, and make us clean from all wickedness.* I do not say, but that, if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man, and show the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of God’s word: but it is against the true Christian

liberty, that any man should be bound to the numbering of his sins, as it hath been used heretofore in the time of blindness and ignorance."

I suppose there are few clergy who are not familiar with this form of Confession. It is sometimes the private discussion of religious doubts and difficulties, sometimes of moral doubts and difficulties; it is sometimes conducted in the presence of hearers; indeed, two or three persons may be dealt with at once. It is, in fact, the primitive germ from which the Confessional sprang.

3. No form of absolution is provided. As this kind of Confession was only contemplated as preceding attendance at Holy Communion, the penitent would receive absolution, just as others did, there in the course of the service.

The second passage is that in the Visitation of the Sick. As to this it will be observed that:—

(1) Absolution is conditional on the re-

quest of the person ; it is no compulsory part of a sacramental act.

(2) The priest has no option if absolution be desired. He cannot refuse it—"The Priest shall absolve him."

(3) The absolution "from all thy sins" can only be the statement of the ecclesiastical voice on earth—the remittance of ecclesiastical censure or penalty ; for, *after the absolution*, the priest prays :—"Continue this sick member in the unity of the Church : consider his contrition, accept his tears . . . impute not unto him his former sins." This prayer is everywhere absolutely incompatible with priestly forgiveness of sins save in the sense of the release from earthly penalties and obligations.

Finally, let it be remembered that the English Church (1) refuses to accept Penance as a Sacrament (Article XXV.) ; (2) provides no form of absolution for any save the sick ; and (3) nowhere speaks of regular resort to a Confessional.

If this be the position of our Church, whence are the laws and custom of the Neo-Anglican Confessional derived? The answer is, Not from England but from Rome. This is apparent from every chapter of Pusey's Gaume.

Pusey has no hesitation about seeking his support in the decrees of the Council of Trent. He habitually refers to this and other late Roman authorities.

Thus, "The Council of Trent teaches that venial sins may be remitted by other means" (Pusey, pp. 233-4). On frequent communion he quotes Pope Benedict XIV., 1740-1758 (p. 234); "the Roman Catechism, explaining the order of the Council of Trent" (p. 235); the Third Council of Milan, 1573 (p. 235); Innocent XI., 1676-1689 (p. 235). In like subservience to Rome we get such words as "Urge him to return speedily to confession according to the opinion expressed by Benedict XIV. in his Apostolic Bull" (p. 280); and "Such is the intention of the Church as we find in

the Roman ritual" (p. 288). These references could be augmented almost indefinitely. It may be urged that Pusey was translating a Roman book. The excuse will not do. Pusey's own biographer says:—"This work may be said to be Pusey's rather than Gaume's" ("Life," iv., App. A, p. 435).

In fine, the Confessional, as recommended by the Neo-Anglicans, is the product of the dark ages, is rejected by our Church, but, alike in its doctrine and its practice, is borrowed by some of her ministers from Rome.

CHAPTER IV

THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR THE CONFES- SIONAL : THE APPEAL TO STATISTICS

No charge against the Confessional has been more frequent than this—that it has helped to weaken, or even to destroy, the character both of the confessor and the penitent. The charge is boldly met. It is claimed that the Confessional is a moral agent of the highest order, and especially that in regard to sins of the flesh it has a purifying and protective influence. The Confessional is, in fact, recommended as a means of grace, of peculiar efficacy and clearly proved value. To neglect it is, we are asked to believe, to despise a prophylactic which might be of incalculable advantage to the Christian man and woman.

If this claim could be supported, many

objectors to the custom would feel a difficulty in resisting the plea for the Confessional. They would argue that the temptations of life are so many and so severe that persons anxious to "live a godly, righteous and sober life" would do well to make trial of any means which promised help in their conflict with sin.

The appeal to history would at once, of course, cast doubt on such a claim. But they might not feel that the argument from history was final. We may fairly urge that at the Reformation the Confessional was put upon its trial and condemned. If at that period there were any places where the power of the Confessional to protect men and women against the grosser vices of the flesh should have been clearly demonstrated, it was in the religious houses. There, at all events, it had full play. There it appealed to those who should most fully have understood its worth. There, however, it seems most absolutely and conclusively to have demonstrated its own

failure. The curious may, if they please, consult to-day the catalogues of vices confessed to by inmates of those religious houses. If any man after looking at them can suppose the Confessional to have been a protection against vice in its lowest and most detestable forms, he must be a singularly credulous person.

But the verdict of history might perhaps be set aside by some objectors, on the ground that the times had changed, and that the failure of one age might be redeemed by the triumph of a later.

It is necessary, therefore, to look at the moral argument for the Confessional in the light entirely of the modern claims made on its behalf, and the modern facts which either support or negative those claims.

Let us see what those claims are.

In Pusey's Preface to Gaume (p. xix, ed. 1893) is this passage:—" 'There are some sins of young men,' I had occasion once to

say to Bishop Wilberforce, 'for which Confession is *the* remedy.'"

The late Rev. J. P. F. Davidson, of St. Matthias's, Earl's Court, in a little pamphlet entitled "Confession in the Church of England" (Wells Gardner & Co.), says: "I have often found that a first Confession is the real starting-point in the more serious life of the soul. And as that Confession is followed up by the continual use of this ministry, at regular intervals (not necessarily frequent), the serious impressions of sin are deepened. . . . The moral character certainly does not suffer from this deepening seriousness. It is braced by the earnest determination to face its vices and its secret faults, and gradually to overcome them" (pp. 10, 11). And again: "It becomes the occasion for healing domestic discord, and pressing upon husband and wife, upon parents and children, the Christian duties of sympathy, of affection, and of self-sacrifice" (pp. 11, 12).

The "St. Bartholomew's Church Tracts"

represent popular Neo-Anglican teaching. In one of these, already referred to, entitled "Do You Hold with Confession?" the claim is put even more pointedly: "Confession is the most powerful means of turning people from sin, and the devil knows it well. There are thousands of people who feel that Confession has been the saving of them" (p. 6).

These claims are sufficiently sweeping, and compel examination.

Here, however, one preliminary fact must be kept in mind. Individual testimony should have its weight, but it cannot be decisive. When the Confessional was under discussion a year or two ago some correspondents of the morning newspapers seemed to think they could settle the doubts of inquirers once and for all by saying in effect something like this:—"I go to Confession regularly; I am an exceedingly moral person and a very determined character. Therefore the moral value of the Confessional is proved by my experience."

These interesting confessions are no doubt made in absolute sincerity, though they seem commonly to be read with amused scepticism. But we are offered merely X.'s personal conviction as to the strength of his moral character, and a cautious observer craves a little independent testimony. Moreover, we hear only one side of the question. The failures of the Confessional do not rush into print with their experiences.

But we must look at the question a little more broadly.

Attempts have been made by some apologists for Rome to show that the Roman faith is peculiarly conducive to good morals. The English defenders of the Confessional in like manner nibble at statistics in order to show that the Confessional is the guardian of virtue. The following extract from the St. Bartholomew's tract, "Do You Hold with Confession?" is typical:—

"As to the supposed bad effects of Confession, consider this: The Irish people, as a whole, go to Confession. We should

expect to see any bad effects which follow from a particular practice shown very markedly when it is practised on so large a scale. Yet what is the case? Statistics show that Ireland is twice as pure as England, and three times as pure as Scotland. And, moreover, Ireland is less pure in the North, where many of the people do not go to Confession" (p. 7).

A falsehood is never so dangerous as when a grain of truth is mixed in its composition. The false allegation that the Confessional makes for personal purity contains this grain of truth, that the Irish statistics of illegitimacy are good. Let us be quite frank, and allow all possible weight to figures which, although the author of the tract does not give them, candid disputants may be glad to have. They show the tract-writer's inaccuracy; but it is not decided enough to invalidate the general argument as to Ireland. In 1896 the illegitimate birth-rate per 1000 was:—Scotland, 72; England, 42; Ireland, 26.

(Mulhall, "Dictionary of Statistics," 1899, p. 645.)

For the moment we will ignore the highly suspicious fact that Ireland is the only country cited by the defenders of the Confessional; for the argument can be met without going further. If the Confessional is a moral safeguard, its influence will not be confined to sins of impurity; it will also tend to reduce other crimes. How, then, was it that the Confessional failed to protect Ireland against the ghastly murders, the cattle-maiming, the rick-burning, and other crimes of violence and disorder which so plentifully soil the pages of her modern history? The question may be left with those who to-day make the same claim for the moral value of the Confessional as was made in the face of equally inconvenient facts by the Council of Trent.

But, as I have said, the isolation of Ireland in this particular is exceedingly suspicious. If the argument is worth anything, it should hold good of other countries

—if not as decisively, at least with sufficient distinctness to carry conviction. The subject is an unpleasant one; but, as it is raised by the defenders of the Confessional, it must be dealt with. The following table, constructed from Mulhall (p. 645), gives the illegitimate births per 1000 in 1896:—

Austria (Roman Catholic)	. . .	145
Portugal (Roman Catholic)	. . .	123
Sweden (Protestant)	. . .	107
Denmark (Protestant)	. . .	101
Germany (about two-thirds Protestant)	. . .	91
France (Roman Catholic)	. . .	88
Belgium (Roman Catholic)	. . .	87
Scotland (Protestant)	. . .	72
Italy (Roman Catholic)	. . .	64
England (Protestant)	. . .	42
Holland (mainly Protestant)	. . .	29
Ireland (Roman Catholic and Protestant)	. . .	26

It will be seen that Italy does not stand high in the list; but according to Von Oettingen, *Die Moralstatistik*, p. 324 (quoted in Lea, "Auricular Confession, ii. 434), the several parts of Italy show a great diversity

in this respect. We should expect, of course, that the Roman State would—in virtue of the presence of the Papal head-quarters, the army of priests at Rome, and its ecclesiastical atmosphere—be the most satisfactory. As a matter of fact it is a long way the worst. From the little table showing for the provinces of Italy the average of illegitimate births per 1000 for the years 1872 to 1879 it appears that whilst Lombardy has but 27.9 illegitimates per 1000, the Roman State has 215.4. The fact recalls the statement of a French authority on criminology, that the French Department of Lozère, where the people are highly religious, is one of those with the highest percentage of criminals (Lea, ii. 435).

Again, if we take great cities instead of countries, the lesson is the same. For the year 1888–89 the illegitimate births per 1000 were for Protestant Berlin 154, for Roman Catholic Vienna 449. The following statistics are from Von Oettingen, and

show the percentage of illegitimates, unfortunately, for varying years:—

London (1866)	.	.	.	.	3.9
Edinburgh (1871)	.	.	.	.	9.5
Berlin (1864)	.	.	.	.	14.9
Madrid (1862)	.	.	.	.	17.2
Dresden (1861)	.	.	.	.	18
St. Petersburg (1862)	.	.	.	.	20.2
Lisbon (1861)	.	.	.	.	21
Paris (1869)	.	.	.	.	28.5
Rome (1871)	.	.	.	.	44.5
Vienna (1868)	.	.	.	.	49.9
Munich (1861)	.	.	.	.	50.9

These figures speak for themselves. They must be read with a due regard for racial and social influences. But even so their destruction of the claim advanced for the Confessional seems to be decisive.

But Rome herself has supplied us with a witness of another kind. Dr. Joseph McCabe is no longer a Romanist, and his experience may on that account be set aside by some persons. He is, however, a man of letters whose evidence is not so lightly to be disposed of. In discussing this question he

pays little regard to statistics, but makes the following assertion :—

“ Within our own frontiers there is a large section of frequenters of the Confessional, and a comparison of their average lives with those of their fellow-citizens reflects no special credit upon their institutions as moral prophylactics. Liverpool and Glasgow are much more Catholic than Manchester or London ; missionaries admit that they are much more immoral ” (“ Twelve Years in a Monastery,” pp. 126, 127).

And again :—

“ I have heard Confessions in very many parts of England and abroad, I have read much casuistical literature which is permeated with Confessional experiences, and I have conferred on the subject with missionaries who have heard hundreds of thousands of Confessions ; and I am convinced that the majority of Catholics are unaffected by the Confessional . . . in the whirligig of life the Confessional is forgotten, and has

no influence whatever on their morality” (*ibid.* pp. 127, 128).

In the face of the statistics already quoted, Dr. McCabe’s words cannot lightly be disregarded. They seem finally to dispose of the plea that the Confessional is a moral prophylactic, attested by the experience of the Roman Church.

CHAPTER V

THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR THE CONFESSIONAL. THE PERIL OF THE CONFESSOR.

I TURN now from the appeal to statistics to other considerations affecting both Confessor and penitent.

I have not so far seen it urged in defence of the Confessional that the Confessor himself derives moral strength and support from interviewing his penitents. But the labours of the Confessor must inevitably affect his character for good or for ill. He cannot attend day by day to have the sins of men, women, and children freely exposed before him, to weigh those sins, to sit in judgment on sinners, without being himself affected. The supporters no less than the opponents of the Confessional are com-

pelled to ask, What is the moral effect of the Confessional on the clergy who act as Confessors? This aspect of the subject, however delicate, must be considered, in the interests no less of the clergy than of their people. What help does the English literature of the subject provide towards an answer to the question?

The condition of things is at least ominous. For it is at once apparent that, if no claims are made as to the moral profit derived by the Confessor from his work in the Confessional, there is no lack of warning against the moral disaster which may overtake him. Nor in those warnings can we fail to recognise the admission of familiar and grievous evil. They assuredly point to some of the saddest facts in the Church's past history; to the admitted and consistent depravity in other ages of so many clergy who practised in the Confessional. But they cannot have a merely academic interest and no present meaning, or they would find no place in the books of to-day.

Once more the witness of Pusey in his edition of Gaume's Manual is decisive and even clamorous. He has a section headed "Counsels for such Confessors as are Liable to Temptation," in which, whilst he urges them not to be kept from the work by the fear of falling (pp. 90, 91), he frankly sets forth some conspicuous perils.

Thus, amongst the dangers to be met with by a Confessor, Pusey cites "being himself more or less polluted by the impurities he has to hear told out" (p. 94), a peril which any student of human nature will admit to be most serious.

He is at great pains to warn against the dangers in dealing with female penitents, pointing out that "this circumspection is specially necessary where your penitents' youth or attractions, the subjects you have to deal with . . . are liable to make any unwonted impression on your heart or on their own" (p. 105).

In recommendations as to dealing with young women he delivers what might, to

the inexperienced, have seemed a superfluous warning against "permitting them to kiss your hand" (p. 107). He proceeds to quote St. Augustine's caution against the ease with which *Spiritualis devotio convertitur in carnalem*; adding the melancholy, startling reflection, "How many good priests have been the victims of such affections, begun in piety, and have at last lost both piety and God Himself!" (p. 108).

When he further speaks of men who "do not fear to hear confessions at times when they themselves are in mortal sin" (p. 109), "being the cause of temptation to others, therein proving yourself no spiritual father, but rather a ravening wolf; no minister of God, but of the devil; no physician, but the murderer of souls" (p. 99), it must be clear that Pusey himself fully recognised the urgent peril of the worst sins admitted in the Confessional overtaking, through its influence, the Confessor himself.

But how could Pusey or any other

adviser do otherwise? In this book he draws for the support of his case, and for the material of his instruction to Confessors, from Roman sources; and the Roman Church has always admitted the dangers of the Confessional. His authorities are teachers of the type of his chief guide, Liguori, whose pages teem with statements and discussions indescribably gross and obscene. Pusey, as every chapter in his book shows, knew how real the dangers of the Confessional to the Confessor had been in those ages; nor could he have been unaware with what plenitude of minutely nauseous but perhaps inevitable detail they have been handled by the Roman authorities.

The warnings which he conveys are, to those who know, only the faint echo of the Roman Church's past struggles against the sins produced by the Confessional. Councils laboured to fight the most familiar of these evils. The Inquisition had its attention directed to them. Casuists discussed such questions as whether a woman

should go to confession when the only priest available was known to solicit his female penitents; and whether, if a priest absolved his own paramour for sinning with him, the absolution held good. Truly Pusey's cautions were, to those who set store by Roman example, most natural.

Here in England we are tempted to soothe ourselves with the assurance that these things belong either to other times or other countries. We are entitled to view our clergy with a confidence that every nation does not, because it dare not, give. But we have reason to know that even the Englishman is not always strong.

The public allegations of the late Father Chiniquy—to go no further—show that the old evil is still not abolished in other lands. Nay, have we not had our warnings here at home? Is it not a fact that the quite recent records of an English diocese contain the official details of a case as scandalous almost as any of old time? Did not Archdeacon Allen adduce in Con-

vocation (July 4, 1877, "Chronicle of Convocation," 1877, pp. 231, 232), the testimony of "an elderly clergyman—a rural dean . . . a venerable and wise High Churchman," to the effect that in his own experience he had "known three clergymen who had practised this teaching of habitual Confession as a duty who had fallen into habits of immorality with women who came to them for guidance"? Did not the Bishop of Truro (Dr. Gott, "Charge," 1897, p. 97), speak of "many a fallen Confessor" as a warning that "the instrument is able to kill as well as cure, and that it often wounds the hand of the untrained or unholy practitioner"?

We are entitled to believe that the English clergy are the purest in the world; but, so long as human nature remains what it is, we have no right to ignore the perils against which Pusey and others warn Confessors—perils to the persistence of which known facts witness. A show of indignation at the bare possibility of a Confessor's

fall stands condemned in the presence of the very literature to which the Confessor goes for guidance. If his friends deny the peril, its reality must at least be known to him. "If you had no fears," says Pusey (p. 90), "I should fear for you. I should question whether it be wise to urge you to a ministry wherein you would be so liable to fall from not fearing its perils, and consequently taking no precautions; for I do not deny that there are many perils."

There are, however, other dangers to the Confessor. Does the constant hearing of the sins of others tend to increase the sensitiveness of the Confessor's own conscience? Can the belief that he, a frail and erring man, has it in his power to send the vilest sinner away absolutely pardoned—to do this though he himself should be in mortal sin, "opening the gates of Hell for themselves while they open those of Heaven to others" (Pusey, p. 109)—tend to increase his sense of the awfulness of sin and the soul's need of a Saviour? May not sin

become to him merely a kind of professional fact, to be thought of and treated as such?

Is there any security that Confessors will not find even a morbid pleasure, unsanctified and perilous to themselves, in listening to the secrets of others' hearts? May they not regulate their use of the Confessional accordingly? "Confessors," says Pusey, "should not give themselves so wholly to confessing women as to refuse men who may seek them. It is a sad sight to see Confessors giving their whole morning to young women-devotees while they dismiss men or married women" (Pusey, p. 108).

There is another aspect of the Confessional in which the moral influence upon the Confessor is important. The youngest priest, fresh from the University or the Theological College, unskilled in the knowledge of his own heart or the complex problems of human life, unpractised in the discerning of motives, is told to regard himself as the repository of the most awful powers. He can, to use Pusey's phrase,

lock or unlock the gates of Heaven itself. How can he exercise this office with confidence or peace of mind? How can he avoid the awful conviction that at intervals he must err; must absolve the guilty or condemn the innocent; may by over-laxity encourage a soul in sin, or by over-stringency drive one into despair?

The danger is no imaginary one. The priest is supposed to weigh, and to weigh accurately—however limited his own experience of life or of his duty—the guilt or innocence of the most complicated acts and the most obscure motives. He undertakes a task for which omniscience is needed, and he is only a man. He is taught, indeed, to look for the guidance of God; but an immense mass of literature on the subject shows that he must expect no supernatural illumination. By prayer and study he is to attain what Pusey calls (p. 62) “a sound, practical, moral science.” He is to beware of being opinion-

ated, and is bidden to observe how theologians differ.

But who are the guides to whom he must go? He is an English Churchman, and he is exercising a function which, on the showing of men like Pusey, is of almost indescribable delicacy and danger. What help, what warning, what guidance does his Church offer? None; not a word, not a syllable. The English Church as a Church has nothing to say by way of instruction, guidance, or warning for the priest in the Confessional. It has adopted no system of Moral Theology and made no provision for the direction of its clergy in one of the most thorny of paths. It is an amazing deficiency if the Reformers expected the Confessional as an institution and Penance as a Sacrament to continue as in pre-Reformation days. It is natural enough if they believed they had abolished the old regular resort to a mainly corrupt and degrading institution.

To what sources, therefore, must the

young Confessor go? To the Continental guides with whom Pusey's Gaume and "The Priest in Absolution" have helped to make so many familiar. "The Priest in Absolution," despite some offensive passages, is, however, a work of decency and restraint compared with the Continental books to which any student must betake himself. Those works form, as Archbishop Magee has put it, "A museum of spiritual iniquity at which fiends may shudder and blush; where murderers may learn cruelty; where hoary-headed convicts may be taught fraud; and satyrs impurity." Pusey's Gaume is, as I have pointed out, a bowdlerised version of the same original. But the references in Pusey to, for example, Liguori are constant, and the English student who would verify his references is, in effect, directed to a literature which has cast all decency aside.

Even as it is, the instructions to the Confessor amply suggest the extreme difficulties of his task. I will take him as

represented by the "Priest in Absolution," because Mr. Mackonochie stated that this work embodied the principles followed by English clergy engaged in this work. For brevity I will not quote verbatim; but the abstract can be verified by any who question its accuracy.

It is laid down (*ibid.* Part I.) that the Confessor must know (1) how to distinguish between "sins unto death and sins not unto death"; (2) how to classify sins; (3) when to order restitution; (4) how to discover "the immediate source or occasion producing the evil," and the best remedies; (5) the "proper dispositions . . . the penitent ought to entertain"; and (6) the penances and remedies usually enjoined; finally (7) he must be an apt moral theologian so as to know what cases to decide and what cases to reserve (p. 7).

Furthermore, "to the knowledge of a moral theologian must be added the decision of a judge." He must not decide against Holy Scripture or "Catholic Canons

rightly interpreted," or manifest reason. He must "go on something more than probability in cases of right or fact, of what is lawful and what is valid." Where opinions are equally balanced, he must take his own line with due regard to the circumstances of the case (*ibid.* p. 9). All this, be it remembered, as a preliminary to opening or shutting the gates of heaven. In fact, even whilst claiming to exercise this awful power, the priest has "*learnt* how to put questions discreetly, how to *absolve without error*, and how to retain sins without loss to the penitent" (*ibid.* p. 14; the italics here are mine).

To these and other general directions are added "Hints for the Priest in Examining the Penitent," which instruct him particularly how to cross-examine those who come to him. Here quotation or even a summary is impossible, as may be judged by the fact that the priest is told how to inquire as to "conjugal duty." Upon this subject even a celibate Confessor, however

juvenile, is required to have very precise and minute opinions.

To the inexperienced it would seem that a lifetime would be too short in which to master even in theory the moral theology required for the right discharge of a Confessor's duties. But the difficulty of the learner seems in part to be removed by the many suggestions that (as we should expect) he can only do his best. A single extract from Pusey will sufficiently illustrate these difficulties and the way in which the practising Confessor is instructed to deal with them. The subject suggested is "a question of certain occupations, of actions which are dangerous in themselves, but not actual sins." Pusey says:—

"A discreet Confessor will put hindrances in the way of such occupations, and only permit them when accompanied with such precautions as may avert their danger. Thus in the question of occasions of sin, supposing a person to have been twenty times in the society of a woman, and to

have been led into sin nine times, it would be blamably lax of you not to observe that this is a proximate occasion, and not to insist upon a cessation of intercourse, because they had met more often without sinning than guiltily. But if in similar circumstances these persons had resisted sin, and had only failed two or three times by interior acts, it would be over-severe to insist on putting an end to such an occasion of sin. Of course I should except a case where you had special reason to take a different course, or to believe that your penitent would not abstain from sin if he continued to meet that person. A wise Confessor would insist in the first instance on the occasion of sin being at once avoided; in the second he would begin by putting difficulties in the way, by exhorting his penitent, and warning him of his danger. But if it is difficult for him to leave the person who is the cause of temptation altogether, you may insist on certain precautions, such as that he should not remain

alone with that person, and that if he falls into sin he should at once come and confess it. A rigorist Confessor will allow no hindrance in the avoiding an immediate occasion of sin, save physical impossibility ; the lax Confessor accepts excuses which cannot even plead a moral impossibility. Do you, as a discreet Confessor, accept such excuses as amount practically to moral impossibility, even though they do not amount to physical impossibility ; but point out the means whereby the occasion may be removed " (pp. 70, 71).

Can it fairly be argued that the persistent exercise of such an occupation as this passage suggests can be without peril to the conscience and spiritual life of the Confessor ?

I do not wish to fasten on English Confessors all the evils of the casuistry of Rome. But the guide to whom Pusey over and over again refers them is Liguori. He died in 1787, and is a comparatively modern authority. It is not without reason

that the system of moral theology taught by him has been regarded as the embodiment of craft, deceit, and impurity. In effect it allows the sinner to observe towards God an attitude which between man and man would in England be deemed contemptible deceit. It instructs men how to sin at the least cost ; how to get to Heaven whilst sacrificing as little as possible of the sins of earth. What wonder that Diana, the greatest of the casuists, was blasphemously honoured with the title of *Agnus Dei*, as taking away the sins of the world ?

Is there no danger, even to clergy, in handling a system of morals such as this ? I know of no answer save the suggestion that our clergy, as Englishmen, must be presumed to be superior to the weaknesses so painfully evidenced in the Continental history of the Confessional. We are entitled to argue that racial characteristics, the circumstances of English life, and the high level of honour amongst our clergy

count for much. But they do not place even the Englishman beyond the reach of perils which have made the history of the Confessional the foulest blot in the record of the Western Church.

CHAPTER VI

THE MORAL ARGUMENT FOR THE CONFESSIONAL: THE INFLUENCE ON THE PENITENT.

WE have now to consider the influence of the Confessional on the penitent.

The case of children may be taken first. I fear that the extent to which the Confessional is forced upon little children by Anglican clergy is as yet imperfectly understood; but the facts are sufficiently clear. Pusey (in accordance with his habit of accepting Roman authority as applying to the English Church) quotes a decision of the Council of Trent for direction as to the age at which Confession should begin. His acceptance of its dictum is interesting, especially as Pusey's own Church has nothing to say on, and not the smallest

countenance to offer to, the position in regard to child penitents which he adopts from Rome. The passage is as follows:—

“The Council of Trent says:—‘*Si quis negaverit omnes et singulos fideles utriusque sexus, cum ad annos discretionis pervenerint, teneri singulis annis, saltem in paschate, ad communicandum justa præceptum sanctæ matris ecclesiæ, anathema sit.*’ And elsewhere it decides that none are exempt from these obligations, save ‘*parvulos usu rationis carentes.*’ You need not fear to apply this precept in its proportion to confession, and absolve them with great benefit to their souls, all the more as the ordinary and right custom among the faithful is, to bring children to confession from the time they are seven years old; and it is a great negligence in parents to omit doing so” (Pusey’s *Gaume*, p. 159).

In agreement with this complete acceptance of the Roman doctrine, children are, by a plentiful literature, taught the necessity of early and regular attendance at the Con-

fessional, not merely for moral support and guidance, but for the saving of their souls. Thus in "A Little Catechism for Little Catholics" (third edition; W. Knott) we have the following questions and answers:—

"How is actual sin forgiven?—Actual sin is forgiven in Baptism and afterwards by the Sacrament of Penance" (p. 12).

"What is the Sacrament of Penance?—Penance is a Sacrament whereby the sins, which we have committed after Baptism, are forgiven" (p. 17).

"How does the Priest forgive sins?—The Priest forgives sins by the power of God when he says, 'I absolve thee from all thy sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'" (p. 17).

So in "Confession" (edited by a Committee of Clergy; W. Knott) we have this:—

"Absolution is the pardon which God, for Christ's sake, gives to the penitent, by the ministry of the Priest. To confess and to receive absolution is the appointed means

by which a sinner can be again restored to the favour of God " (p. 13).

" Absolution may be received as soon as a person has attained the age of reason " (p. 14).

The " First Communion " (second edition ; W. Knott) opens with a long statement urging the necessity of confessing before communicating for the first time :—

" Jesus can do for you what no one else can. He can make your soul all white and clean again. . . . That is what He is going to do for you in the Sacrament of Penance, for which you are now waiting. In order that He may be able to do this you must be careful to make a good confession ; for without this you cannot really be absolved " (p. 10).

Such is the doctrine which week by week is being taught in a certain number of parishes.

What is likely to be its moral effect on children ?

It is no part of my purpose here to con-

sider the spiritual effect of such teaching, or its after influence upon the faith of young people—a subject upon which much could be said. Here I am only considering the results as to the character and conduct of the penitent.

The first impression upon children is doubtless one of fear. The late Bishop of Salisbury, Dr. Moberly, in the Convocation Debate on “The Priest in Absolution” put this in the forefront of his objections to the system:—“I believe,” he said, “the practice of habitual confession to be mischievous in the highest degree, and I have a particular object in referring to it, for the greater part of my life . . . has been spent as a schoolmaster, and I confess that there is not one thing in all the world which is deeper in my heart and conscience than the corrupting mischief of any such system as this getting into our schools. . . . We all know that little children six or seven years of age are frightened out of their wits if they are

told they must go to a clergyman and speak of what they have been doing, and yet according to this system they must go. It appears to me to be cruel in the last degree" ("Chronicle of Convocation," 1877, p. 331).

The testimony of the Bishop is decisively corroborated in a letter now before me. It is written by a man of letters who was reared in the Church of Rome, is now a member of the English Church, and a High Churchman. "The harm," says my correspondent, "which he [the priest] does in other ways is incalculable, especially if (as often happens) he is a stupid man dealing with sensitive or morbid children. In my experience it is the children who suffer—I know I suffered agonies."

Thus the child, taught that it cannot hope for the pardon of its sins, unless it goes to Confession, learns at the age of seven to associate the thought of approach to God with fear and shrinking, with the suffering of "agonies," with feelings of

dread which are in the most striking contrast to every thought of child access to God suggested by the New Testament.

Yet in the child's mind the agony is produced, not by the access to God, but by the approach to a human intermediary. The child in time comes to appreciate the distinction. It learns that the person who stands in the place of God is, after all, very human. His weaknesses are the subject of comment and discussion ; his little tempers, his mistakes, his foibles, his frequent exhibitions of commonplace humanity, accord ill with the character he assumes to himself in the Confessional. The dread sooner or later, therefore, loses any religious character ; either it becomes resentment against a human institution and its human agent, or it passes into unconcern.

As the Church of Rome is at least as exacting in the matter of the Confessional as any of the Anglican clergy, we may reasonably assume that what is true of the children brought to the Roman Confessional

will, in the main, be true also of children brought to the Anglican Confessor. The evidence of Dr. McCabe may therefore be admitted. It is exactly what we should expect :—

“Needless to say, the Confession of the average child of seven or eight is a mere farce; they used to be marched over to us from the schools every three months, after a careful drilling from their teachers, but scarcely one child in ten had the faintest glimmering of an idea of the nature of the operation they were subjected to. Few of them could even be sufficiently instructed to fulfil the material part of the ceremony; they mixed the various parts of the formulæ in the most unintelligible fashion, and generally wished to retreat before they had received the essential object of their coming—absolution” (“Twelve Years in a Monastery,” p. 129).

That the institution fails to keep its hold upon young people, and that the number who go on frequenting the Anglican Con-

fessional after having been brought to it in childhood is very small, is, I believe, freely conceded. But even so it would not follow that it was harmless. As a preparation for coming to Confession, there is put into the hands of children manuals which suggest minute self-examination of the kind already illustrated (Chap. I., pp. 14-17). Curiosity is one of the most powerful influences in childhood, and it is scarcely possible that some of the directions for self-examination should fail to excite prurient and morbid thought about subjects to which no wise person would wantonly turn the minds of children.

In the Confessional itself this danger again arises. Pusey repeatedly warns Confessors against communicating to the young thoughts of evil to which they had been strangers. Writing of Gaume's questions for the "ill-instructed," which "The Priest in Absolution" reproduced for the use of English clergy, he says:—"I know not how some of them could be put without

the risk of teaching evil, happily unknown" (Preface to Pusey's *Gaume*, p. 15). The caution and the admission are sufficient witnesses that this evil does happen; that the man sitting to hear in the place of God, and to declare pardon in the name of God, may plant the first thought of grievous impurity in the mind of a boy or a girl. To that seedling the abundant crop of a ruined and corrupt life may hereafter be traced.

That this is no imaginary peril will be recognised by every one who has studied child-life, who has watched the effects of curiosity, of morbid speculation, of prurient inquiry, on young lives. With the Confessional at its best, the Confessor the wisest, and the youthful penitent the purest, the danger exists. But Confessors are not always wise. Pusey himself admits that "a lax Confessor" will treat children from seven to twelve "as he would grown-up people who were guilty of the same faults" (*Gaume*, p. 158).

It is said that the practice of urging boys to Confession is now prevalent in a certain number of English schools. The fear expressed by Bishop Moberly (quoted p. 95) of "the corrupting mischief of any such system as this getting into our schools" was well justified. In the absence of direct evidence as to the methods pursued I do not care to discuss the practice; but the persons who think that the morals of boys reared in Continental schools where Confession is enforced furnish a happy augury for the results in England must surely be the victims of culpable credulity.

In the case of young girls Dr. McCabe can, out of a wide experience, speak with some authority. Few persons, I suspect, will dissent from him when he says:—

"It is bad enough for adult men and women to have to kneel weekly or monthly at the feet of a priest (usually one whom they know intimately), and detail every unworthy thought and act into which they have been betrayed, but for girls and young

women to discuss their inmost thoughts and feelings with a person of the opposite sex is vicious and lamentable. If they are still of a refined character, such a practice is a source of exquisite pain, and often leads either to duplicity or to actual debasement; if they are less refined already the temptation to abuse their condition is overpowering" ("Twelve Years in a Monastery," pp. 120, 121).

The results of the Confessional, as he has seen them, amply justify this conclusion. For he says :—

"A yet sadder category is the large number of girls who are actually corrupted by the practice of Confession. Girls who would never dream of talking to their companions, even to their sisters or mothers, on certain points will talk without the least restraint to the priest. They are taught when young that such is the intention of Christ, that in the Confessional every irregular movement (and to their vaguely disciplined moral sense the category embraces the whole

of sexual physiology) must be revealed: they are reminded that nothing superfluous must be added, still that the sense of shame in the Confessional must be regarded as a grave temptation of the Evil One. So they learn to control it, then to lay it aside temporarily, and finally to lose it. They begin to confer with each other on the subject, to compare the impressibility, the inquisitiveness, the knowledge of different Confessors, and make plots (they have admitted so much to me) to put embarrassing questions to priests. For, although they frequently manifest a quick sense of shame and delicacy at the commencing period, they are forced to be more circumstantial in their narratives. A girl will often try to fit in her less delicate transgressions between two common and more respectable peccadilloes, and only accuse herself in a general way of having been 'rude' or immodest. No Confessor can allow such a general accusation to pass: he is bound to recall her and question her minutely on the subject. The

conversation which ensues is much better imagined than described ; for by some curious process of reasoning (assisted by the light of faith) the Church of Rome has deduced from certain words of Christ that the Confessor must have a detailed knowledge of every serious transgression before he can give absolution " (" Twelve Years in a Monastery," pp. 122, 123).

So thoroughly, indeed, does the poison work that there are, it seems, women upon whose morbid natures the habit of confessing so grows that at last they "deliberately concoct the most shameful stories in order to gratify their craving for that peculiar *tête-à-tête* which they have grown accustomed to in the Confessional" (*ibid.* p. 124).

The influence of the Confessional on women suggests the allegation of Mr. Davidson (quoted p. 62) that the Confessional helps to promote the peace and happiness of the family. There is a widely current belief that it has exactly the opposite effect:

that it obtrudes a new and deeply resented authority into the privacy of the home ; that it sows discord between husband and wife, parent and children. It will be admitted that the Liverpool libel action, *Wilson v. Wakeford*, reported in the *Times* of June 2, 1900, scarcely supports Mr. Davidson's theory that the Confessional "becomes the occasion for healing domestic discord." The notorious case of the son of the Rev. A. R. Cavalier, brought before the Bishop of London, seems equally to contradict Mr. Davidson's plea.¹ I prefer the opinion of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, that the Confessional in families "introduces untold mischief. It supersedes God's appointment of intimacy between husband and wife, father and children ; substituting another influence for that which ought to be the nearest and closest, and producing reserve and estrangement where there ought to be perfect freedom and openness."

¹ The facts may be found in the *Record*, March 24, 1899, p. 296, and March 30, 1899, p. 320.

But, to speak more generally, can we hope that with any nature the practice of habitual Confession will be helpful? The Confessor is called a physician, and Confession a medicine for the soul; but what healthy person wishes to visit his doctor once a week or to dose himself regularly with medicine?

Habitual Confession encourages a morbid mental habit, the curious inquiry into sinful motions, the systematic contemplation of sinful thought and deed. To meditate upon evil, to tabulate (as Pusey says) "*Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando*"; to scrutinise "the degree of sin," and to pry into the "purely interior will and desires" (Pusey, p. 153), is at least to run a danger of encouraging the growth and vitality of the evil impulse.

Habitual Confession promotes unwarrantable and dangerous discrimination as to sins. Some, the penitent is taught, are mortal, some venial. Much must be made of one class, little of the other. The mind is led to

regard the latter with comparative unconcern, and grievously to mislead itself, possibly to its own undoing.

Habitual Confession promotes a false sense of security. Absolution given, the sin is wiped out. "Go, and sin no more" is, no doubt, the message of the Confessional; but where pardon is so simple a transaction the message loses its force. Here Jeremy Taylor—as good an authority, no doubt, as a modern Anglican Confessor—speaks with characteristic decision :—

“ Men look upon it as a certain cure, like pulling off a man's clothes to go and wash in a river, and make it by use and habit, by confidence and custom, to be no certain pain, and the women blush or smile, weep or are unmoved, as it happens, under their veil, and the men under the boldness of their sex: when we see that men and women confess to-day, and sin to-morrow, and are not affrighted from their sin the more for it, because they know the worst of it, and have felt it often, and believe to be

eased by it ; certain it is, that a little reason and a little observation will suffice to conclude, that this practice of Confession hath in it no affrightment, not so much as the horror of the sin itself hath to the conscience. For they who commit sins confidently, will with less regret (it may be) confess it in this manner, where it is the fashion for every one to do it. And when all the world observes how loosely the Italians, Spaniards, and French do live in their carnivals, giving to themselves all liberty and license to do the vilest things at that time, not only because they are for a while to take their leave of them, but because they are (as they suppose) to be so soon eased of their crimes by Confession, and the circular and never-failing hand of the priest ; they will have no reason to admire the severity of Confession, which as it was most certainly intended as a deletory of sin, and might do its first intention, if it were equally managed ; so now certainly it gives confidence to many men to sin, and to most men to neglect the

greater and more effective parts of essential repentance" ("Dissuasive from Popery," Chap. ii., Sec. 2).

Here, too, I may fairly quote the admissions of the Rev. J. P. F. Davidson :—

"Confession may be perverted to the deadening rather than the quickening of the Conscience. The Priest, in the exercise of this Ministry, has need to watch carefully the effect which it is producing on the souls that come to him : whether it is stimulating them, as it should be, to more personal effort in the spiritual life, and to a livelier sense of their own responsibilities ; or whether, by a perversion of its proper purpose, it is tending to enervate the life by the substitution of another conscience for its own" ("Confession in the Church of England," p. 14).

Habitual Confession, according to Mr. Davidson, has a special peril for the devout :—

"Another danger is the encouragement of an over-scrupulous and too self-intro-

spective spirit. The snares of the devil are manifold, and while, perhaps, the greater number of professing Christians are tempted to carelessness and indifference, for the earnest he prepares the snare of scrupulousness, which consumes the vital energies of the soul" (*ibid.* p. 14).

Habitual Confession, even when the subject is a good one, must weaken self-control and self-reliance. The penitent's morality is secured by reliance on the priest. His moral condition is like the physical state of the man kept alive by the resources of the doctor and chemist.

Habitual Confession weakens the sense of responsibility to the laws of God and man. For both those laws are interpreted by, and in effect superseded by, the voice of the Confessor. Is he content? Has he absolved? Are his trifling penances and his possible directions executed? Then all is well.

Whether, then, the Confessional be tried by statistics, by the position of the Con-

fessor, or by the influence on the penitent, the moral argument for it seems hopelessly to fail.

In fine, without plain warrant in Holy Scripture, without sanction by our Church, condemned by the voices of history and experience, the Confessional exists in the English Church mainly, if not solely, because it is commanded and used by Rome.

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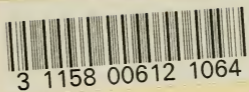
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